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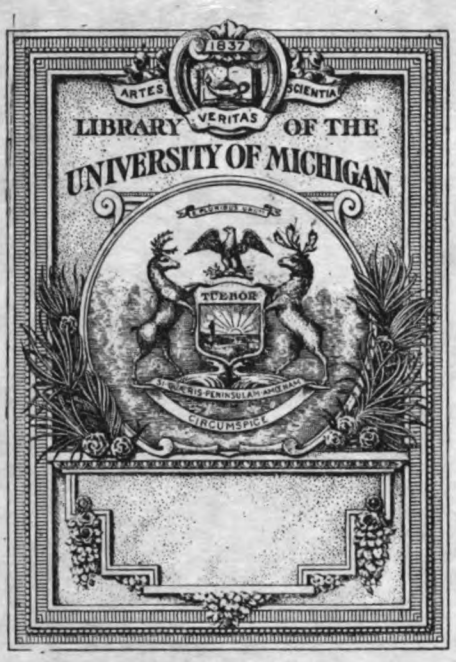

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MISCELLANEOUS. No. 7 (1918).

REPORT

ON

THE TREATMENT BY THE ENEMY

OF

BRITISH PRISONERS OF WAR BEHIND THE FIRING LINES IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM.

WITH TWO APPENDICES.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty.
April 1918.

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Report on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War behind the Firing Lines in France and Belgium.

THE detention and employment by the German armies behind their firing line in Belgium and France of British N.C.Os. and men captured on the Western front has brought upon these prisoners an amount of unjustifiable suffering, for which a parallel would be hard to find in the history, tragic in so many of its incidents as that history has been, of the treatment by the enemy of their prisoners, during this war.

The evidence on the subject rapidly accumulates, although the story is not yet completely known. In full detail it will not be ascertainable until after the close of hostilities. And this for several reasons. As is well known, both American and Dutch visits to prisoners in occupied districts have always been strictly forbidden by the German Command. The actual condition of the men there has accordingly throughout been hidden from neutral eyes. Again, it has only been slowly that information from other quarters has gradually filtered through to this country. At this no surprise need be felt, for reasons that are obvious. That information, however, has now become comprehensive, and it is especially striking in this, that coming as it does from every kind of independent source, all of it conveys the same impression of acute and prolonged suffering.

Accordingly the Committee are satisfied that they are at length in a position to present this report to His Majesty's Government with confidence that it may be relied upon.

And being so satisfied, the Committee are convinced that such a report ought no longer to be delayed. Their regret is that they have not been in a position to present it earlier. It is right in their view that the authorities should have before them at the earliest possible moment summarised statements as to the treatment of British prisoners behind the enemy fronts both on the West and the East. This report the Committee have thought it well to submit first. A report on the Eastern front they have now in preparation. It is convenient to deal with the two aspects of the subjects separately.

And there is now no doubt in the minds of the Committee that as early, at the latest, as the month of August 1916 the German Command, under conditions to be described later, were systematically employing their British as well as other prisoners in forced labour close behind the Western firing line, thereby deliberately, it must be so said, exposing them to the fire of the guns of their own and Allied armies.

This fact has never been acknowledged by the German Government. On the contrary, it has always been studiously concealed. But that the Germans are chargeable even from that early date with inflicting the physical cruelty and the mental torture inherent in such a practice can no longer be doubted.

Characteristically in this case, as in so many similar instances, when conduct in itself incapable of justification could no longer be concealed, the official German apologist has sought to gloss over or excuse the practice by asserting that Germany was driven to it by way of retaliation for something as bad charged by her against her enemies. In this instance the excuse put forward has been that this treatment, not apparently suggested to be otherwise defensible, was forced upon the German Command as a reprisal for what was asserted to be the fact, namely, that German prisoners in British hands had at some time or other been kept less than 30 kilometres (how much less does not appear) behind the British firing line in France.

Even if to any extent well founded, that excuse would be no justification for the calculated brutality of the so-called reprisals actually adopted. But in truth the excuse itself will not bear examination.

In the despatch in which the assertion just mentioned was first made, and the so-called reprisal first foreshadowed—a despatch dated the 24th of January, 1917—the German Government affirmed that in the French and Belgian territories occupied by German troops no British prisoners of war had hitherto been detained for any considerable time, with the exception of the sick and wounded undergoing treatment in hospitals and the prisoners employed in the hospital services. This statement was quite unfounded. These prisoners in great number, with other prisoners from the Allied armies, had already for months been detained at work immediately behind the German lines in both France and Belgium.

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Furthermore, at the end of April 1917 an agreement was definitely concluded between the British and German Governments that prisoners of war should not on either side be employed within 30 kilometres of the firing line. Nevertheless the German Command continued without intermission so to employ their British prisoners, under the inhuman conditions stated in this report. And that certainly until the end of 1917—it may be even until now—although it has never even been suggested by the German authorities, so far as the Committee are aware, that the 30 kilometres limit agreed upon has not been scrupulously observed by the British Command in the letter as well as in the spirit.

Indeed, the German excuse is too specious to be worthy of serious refutation. It would not have been mentioned at all in this place had it not been for the fact that it is embodied in different official documents, some of which enter into detailed descriptions of the reprisals alleged to be in contemplation because of it. And it so happens that these descriptions are in substantial accord with treatment which the Committee, from the information in their possession, now know to have been in regular operation for months before either the threat or the so-called excuse for it, and to have continued in regular operation after the solemn promise of April that it should cease. These documents accordingly have acquired a certain value of their own, and thus may be usefully referred to. They definitely commit the German Command to at least a threatened course of conduct for which the Committee would have been slow to fix them with conscious responsibility. Incidentally they corroborate in advance the accuracy, in its incidents, of the information, appalling as it is, which has independently reached the Committee from so many sides.

As a typical example, the Committee here set forth a transcript in German-English, of one of these pronouncements of which extensive use was made. It is a notice entitled "Conditions of Respite to German Prisoners." As here given it was handed to a British N.C.O. to be read out, and it was read out to his fellow-prisoners at Lille on the 15th of April, 1917:—

> "Upon the German request to withdraw the German prisoners of war to a distance of not less than 30 kilometres from the front line, the British Government has not replied; therefore it has been decided that all prisoners of war who are captured in future will be kept as prisoners of respite.
>
> "Very short of food, bad lighting, bad lodgings, no beds, and hard work beside the German guns, under heavy shell fire. No pay, no soap for washing or shaving, no towels or boots, &c.
>
> "The English prisoners of respite are all to write to their relations or persons of influence in England, how badly they are treated, and that no alteration in the ill-treatment will occur until the English Government has consented to the German request; it is therefore in the interest of all English prisoners of respite to do their best to enable the German Government to remove all English prisoners of respite to camps in Germany, where they will be properly treated, with good food, good clothing, and you will succeed by writing as mentioned above, and then surely the English Government will consent to Germany's request, for the sake of their own countrymen.
>
> "You will be supplied with postcard, notepaper, and envelope, and all this correspondence in which you will explain your hardships, will be sent as express mail to England."

As will presently appear, that document certainly did not err on the side of over statement.

The Committee have before them the testimony, direct and reported, of many who had already for long been experiencing to the full the treatment there only professedly foreshadowed; they have in their hands the statements of many more who witnessed its effects on victims who survived it or escaped from it. So widespread, indeed, is the Committee's information, even at this stage, that this report would fail of its purpose if the Committee were to attempt to discuss the evidence in detail. They must content themselves for the present with summarising its effect.

And first of all the Committee, as indeed has already been stated, are quite satisfied that the treatment in question commenced to be systematic, not later than August 1916. The prisoners were, it seems, kept in large numbers at certain places in the West—Cambrai and Lille are frequently referred to in the evidence—but in smaller numbers they were placed all along the line. Their normal work was making roads, repairing railways, constructing light railways, digging trenches, erecting wire entanglements, making gunpits, loading ammunition, filling munition

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waggons, carrying trench mortars, and doing general fatigue work, which under pain of death the N.C.Os. were compelled to supervise.

This work was not only forbidden by the laws of war, it was also excessively hard. In many cases it lasted from eight to nine hours a day, with long walks to and fro, sometimes of 10 kilometres in each direction, and for long periods was carried on within range of the shell fire of the Allied armies. One witness was for nine months kept at work within the range of British guns; another for many months; others for shorter periods. Many were killed by these guns; more were wounded; deaths from starvation and overwork were constant.

One instance of the Allied shell fire may be given. It is referred to more than once in the evidence. In May 1917 a British or French shell burst among a number of British and French prisoners working behind the lines in Belgium. Seven were killed; four were wounded.

But there is much more to tell. The men were half starved. Two instances are given in the evidence of men who weighed 13 stone when captured. One was sent back from the firing line too weak to walk, weighing 8 stone only; the other escaped to the British lines weighing no more. Another man lost two stone in six weeks. Parcels did not reach these prisoners, for a reason to be explained later. In consequence they were famished; such was their hunger indeed that we hear of them picking up for food potato peelings that had been trampled under foot. One instance is given of an Australian private who, starving, had fallen out to pick up a piece of bread left on the roadside by Belgian women for the prisoners. He was shot and killed by the guard for so doing.

It was considered, so it would seem, to be no less than a stroke of luck for prisoners to chance upon guards who were more merciful. For instance, one of them speaking of food at Cambrai says:—

> "If it had not been for the French civilians giving us food as we went along the roads to and from work we should most certainly have starved. If the sentries saw us make a movement out of the ranks to get food they would immediately make a jab at us with their rifles, but conditions here were not so bad as at Moretz, where if a man stepped out of the ranks he was immediately shot. I heard about this from men who had themselves been working at Moretz, and had with their own eyes seen comrades of theirs shot for moving from the ranks."

The effect of this starvation diet upon the men is made clear by the statements of many witnesses who saw its results for themselves. Some of these statements will be given later. The effect was just what might have been expected when the rations issued to the men are examined.

Take, as an instance, the food supplied to the prisoners at Ervillers in February 1917. A prisoner's allowance for the day consisted of a quarter of a loaf of German black bread (about ¼ lb.) with coffee in the morning; then soup at midday, and at 4.30 coffee again, without sugar or milk. On this a man had to carry on heavy work of the kind just indicated for over nine hours. The ration of the German soldier at the same time and place consisted of a whole loaf of bread per day, good thick soup with beans and meat in it, coffee, jam, and sugar, two cigars, and three cigarettes.

The food conditions at Marquion a little later are thus described:—

> "We used to beg the sentries to allow us to pick stinging nettles and dandelions to eat, we were so hungry; in fact, we were always hungry, and I should say we were semi-starved all the time.
>
> "The guards got better food than we did. They were only allowed the same ration of bread, but they got butter and thick soup for dinner, a piece of German sausage every day, and once a week fish, and so on.
>
> "Whilst we were here our sergeants put in for more rations, but the answer they got was that we were prisoners of war now, and had no rights of any kind; that the Germans could work us right up behind their front lines if they liked, and put us on half the rations we were then getting."

The ration was coffee and a slice of bread at 4.45 A.M., soup of barley and horse-flesh at 2 P.M., eight pounds of barley and 10 lbs. of meat between 240 men. And they were compelled to work hard as above described for eight or nine hours a day on this diet.

Reference has already been made to the readiness of the guards in some parts of the line to shoot these prisoners for stooping to pick up food. The frequent cruelty of the guards generally is a matter constantly referred to—

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"The German sergeant in charge at Ervillers," says one prisoner, "was very harsh. Twice I saw him (this prisoner was there for a month only) using a dog whip, and heard of him doing so on another occasion. He used it mostly on men who were slow in getting out to work owing to weakness."

The description by a body of these men on their arrival at a camp in Germany, after being withdrawn from the front, may be taken as another example of this:—

"We were forced to work; we were given hardly any food, and when we fell down from sheer exhaustion we were kicked until we got up again, and it was not until we absolutely could not get about that we were sent back."

To add to their miseries, the accommodation provided for these prisoners was in many cases pathetically inadequate. The witnesses recur to this again and again. One sleeping place, for instance, for a large party, was a barn with no roof. The rain poured in upon the men. They had to sleep in their wet clothes and work in the same clothes. They had no change of any kind. And some of these prisoners, if they survived so long, were kept behind these enemy lines for over a year. One of them thus describes their quarters at Cambrai:—

"We slept about 12 in a room in our uniforms without either greatcoats or blankets. There was no fire, and it was very cold. We lay on loose straw, which was full of vermin, and we consequently became verminous. We could only wash in a bucket of cold water without either soap or towels."

Another adds:—

"The Germans did not supply us with any clothing, and as we had to work in all weathers, conditions were very hard. Our clothes used to get drenched through, but still we had to go back to barracks and sleep in them It was terribly cold also, especially without our fur coats. We asked for clothing, but never got any."

Here is a description of accommodation at Lille:—

"We were accommodated 110 in a room 15 feet by 20 feet. We slept on the bare boards without blankets. There was no means of sanitation except a barrel standing in the corner of the room. It was so cold that the windows had to be closed at night, and of course the smell in the room was awful. We were never given any clothes."

But added to all these hardships it was the total absence of parcels and the fact that letters or communications from their friends rarely reached them that placed these prisoners, for misery, in a class apart.

Prisoners in German parent camps have received their parcels with, as a general rule, some approach to regularity. Correspondence with their friends, not in frequency unreasonably restricted, has been permitted. Censored letters from home have been delivered. But no such privileges were conceded to these prisoners behind the lines.

Instances are on record where the very existence of some of them was undisclosed by their captors for many months. In the month of March 1917, for example, a body of these prisoners who had been captured as long before as August 1916 and had been kept at work by the Germans behind their lines ever since, were returned to a parent camp in Germany weak and emaciated. On arrival there they found a number of their own names in the lists of missing men that had been sent from our War Office through Switzerland and posted in the camp.

Even those prisoners whose existence was not withheld received few, if any, letters. They were apparently allowed to write postcards, in some cases letters, but certainly in a very great number, indeed, it would seem in the majority of instances, these postcards and letters for some reason still unexplained, never reached their destinations, and to all intents and purposes their writers remained dead to their world.

The increase of preventible suffering to the prisoners, to say nothing about the anxiety of their friends, involved in all this can hardly be exaggerated. When added to the torture of their enforced labour, both moral and physical, their insufficient food, the cruelty of their guards, their miserable accommodation, and the absence of even neutral official protection, it made the lot of these men intolerable.

This last particular infliction was doubtless to some extent the result of

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administrative difficulties. For some reason best known to the German Command the existence of prisoners in occupied territory is not officially acknowledged. Neutral visits to them are not, as has been seen, allowed. Their whereabouts may not be disclosed. In any postcard or letter which they were permitted to write, the prisoners were required to give as their camp of address, first Wahn, later Limburg-am-Lahn, later still Friedrichsfeld—all of them German prison camps which no one of these men had ever seen. In theory, the Committee do not doubt the camp authorities at these depôt camps of Wahn, Limburg, or Friedrichsfeld ought to have been informed of each prisoner's existence and location. Theoretically, it was doubtless the duty of someone there to enter his name in the camp books. Equally the Committee do not doubt—they have indeed the best reasons for knowing —that these duties, one or both of them, were more honoured in the breach than in the observance. A number of cases can be vouched in which the depôt camp authorities actually had the news of the death of a prisoner of war before the report of his attachment to their camp had been received or recorded, and that although the man in question had been in German hands for several months Be the reason for the neglect however what it it may, the result was that letters and parcels came to these camps whilst the whereabouts of the men were still unknown, and the letters and parcels in consequence never got any further.

But there was another class of case where parcels remained undelivered for which no merely administrative excuse can be offered, not that it matters much to a starving man whether the reason why his food does not reach him is administrative or another. There were certain places behind the Western front—a hospital and working camp at Tournai may be given as an example—to which the Germans would not forward either correspondence or parcels. For what reason, the Committee do not know. But they would not and did not. In these cases the letters were retained for 28 days. If during that interval the prisoner had not been removed to a place at which he might receive letters, the letters were sent on to Berlin of all places. The parcels were handed to the Local Help Committee, so that the prisoner never received his parcels at all. There were in consequence instances of men who neither received their letters nor their parcels for 8 or 9 months after capture.

It seems almost incredible, but the Committee do not doubt it to be the fact, that, as late as November 1917, there were at Limburg-am-Lahn undelivered between 18,000 and 20,000 parcels for British prisoners on the German Western front. In July 1917, the German Delegates at The Hague, plainly recognised that no distinction in respect of the receipt of parcels could be properly made between prisoners of war in occupied territories and others. The Agreement then concluded contains provisions on that subject. Having regard to the condition of things at Limburg as late as November 1917, the Committee can only regret that the effect of that Agreement was certainly at that date not so manifest as it ought to have been.

The matter is of tragic importance to the prisoners concerned; every consideration of humanity demands that it should be so regarded. It made and makes just the difference between starvation and existence to the unfortunate sufferers.

Having now set forth the conditions which these prisoners behind the German lines were compelled to endure, the Committee propose next to extract from the great mass of evidence now in their possession statements as to the impression produced upon those who actually saw our men upon their escape to the British lines or after their transfer to camps in Germany. These statements the Committee believe, must convince every impartial mind that it is impossible in terms of exaggeration to describe the sufferings these prisoners had undergone.

In April 1917, three of them escaped over "no man's land." They were received by a British General Staff Officer, a Major in the 1st Anzac Corps. This is what he says of them, under date the 18th April, 1917:—

> "Three men escaped from behind the German lines to us the other day. They had been prisoners 3 months, and were literally nearly dead with ill-treatment and starvation. One of them could hardly walk, and was just a skeleton. He had gone down from 13 stone to less than 8 stone in 3 months. I fetched him back from the line, and it almost made me cry. All that awful January and February out all day in the wet and cold; no overcoat, and at night no blanket, in a shelter where the clothes froze stiff on him: no change of underclothing in three months, and he was one mass of vermin, no chance of washing. The bodies of all of them were covered with sores. 'Beaten and starved,' one of them said, 'Sooner than go through it again I'd just put my head under the first railway.'"

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The following is the substance of a statement of a witness from a German camp:—

"About June 1917, a party of about twenty English soldiers came in who had been working behind the German lines on the Western front. I became friends with one of them. He was so weak that I have several times seen him faint on parade.

"Another of them told me that he was one of a party of 100 working behind the lines on the Western front digging trenches and carrying up supplies. He said they were all very badly treated and starved. He said they were knocked about by the Germans if they did not march as fast as they wanted them to, although they were all so weak. He was only sent to Germany when he became so weak as to be useless for work. When I left he did not look as if he could lift a shovelful of sand.

"There was another whom I knew. He had also been working behind the lines. They had to work in clogs and no socks. He said they used to tie rags round their feet. He was employed on road-making. I never could have believed the things I was told but for the terrible state the men were in, which caused me to feel that no horror I was told was impossible."

From the same camp:—

"Many were brought into the camp who had returned from working behind the lines: they were in a shocking state, literally skin and bone, hardly able to walk, and quite worn out physically and mentally; their clothes thread-bare and in rags, without boots, wearing old rag slippers. They told me that the conditions of work behind the lines, where some of them had been for months, were terrible; they had to work 8 hours a day, and generally were made to walk 10 kilometres out to their work, and the only food they were given was one cup of coffee, a slice of bread and some soup a day—a day's ration."

From another camp:—

"In May of this year a large party of British came into the camp who had returned from behind the German lines. They were ravenous through being starved, and half savages. I spoke to several of them. . . . . Men were shot at sight for a slight cause, such as dropping out to get bread from Belgian civilians.

"The state in which they returned was the worst sight I have seen in my life. Their clothes were ragged, they were half shaven, verminous, suffering from skin diseases, and were half savage with hunger and bad treatment.

"After their arrival the Commandant in the camp issued an order (which I saw) that no more of these parties should be taken through the main street of the town, but should go by the byways on account of the feeling that had been caused amongst the population. I am told that the population showed a great deal of sympathy, tears, &c."

From the same camp:—

"About the 1st May, 1917, about 300 prisoners of all nationalities were brought from behind the Western lines. I spoke to those who came into the lazaret. All were starving, and had been kept there until they collapsed from overwork. Fifteen Russians died as soon as they were brought in. One man told me that on a march of 11 kilometres a man fell out ill, the guard gave him so many minutes to fall in again, and told him he would shoot him if he was not up by then; he could not go on, and the guard shot him."

From a third camp:—

"I knew two of our men who had been working behind the German lines in the West for five months. One was 29 years' old, the other 25. The first weighed 13 stone when captured. He left the firing line too weak to walk, and weighed 8 stone. He was badly treated and knocked about. When I saw him in camp he was black and blue. The other man had the same treatment. They were both starved, and both were grey headed with the five months' treatment. These men said our men were dying there every day through hardship and exposure. The food behind the lines was about half the camp rations."

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From a fourth camp:—

" In September 1917, 75 N.C.O.'s, who had been behind the lines, were brought into our camp. They were in a bad physical condition, hungry, lousy, and worked out.

" One month after, a large body, all privates from behind the lines, captured since May, came in. They were in a terrible condition, famished beyond words. They had been worked to the bone, and were in a filthy condition. They made our camp lousy. The camp doctor said they were the worst cases he had seen, and said they could stay in bed for a week. They were so famished that two died of eating the food we gave them.

" They had been working on the Hindenburg Line, and the railway Cambrai to Lille, and repairing it under fire. They said they were on very small rations and compelled to work.

" They told us that French women, who out of compassion gave them any trifling gift of fruit, were knocked down by the sentries."

From the same camp:—

" I spoke to men who had been kept at work behind the German lines on the Western front. The majority of these were there about 12 months, and they came into camp about the end of November or beginning of December 1917. They told me that they had been employed close up to the lines. They had been employed cutting trees, and had been under our own shell fire. They were half starved, and in a terrible condition.

" On one occasion about 300 came in, about forty of whom had British clothes, the rest being dressed in odds and ends of French and German clothing, in fact, anything they could get hold of. We collected bread for them, and cut it up in readiness for their arrival so as to save all possible time, but their hunger was so great they could not help raiding us and fighting for it. It was terrible to see them. I do not think many of them had been wounded, but their condition was so terrible that I cannot describe it. They were absolutely the worst bunch of men I had ever seen. They were terribly thin and weak, and fell down as soon as they started to eat, as they were in an absolutely exhausted state. Their underclothing was in a dreadful state, and they were covered with vermin and had been like that for about 12 months. This is the party which I mentioned as coming to the camp about the end of November or beginning of December 1917. About a fortnight after their arrival, and after their clothes had been fumigated, and they had baths two or three times a week, they picked up wonderfully."

From a fifth camp:—

" In March 1917, I saw 50 English prisoners come in to camp who had been working behind the lines near Cambrai digging trenches; they had been there three or four months. All of them were in a shocking condition, absolutely starved, with boils and sores all over them. We used to share our parcels of food with these men. During the whole time I was in camp, that is up to December last, men were drifting in who had been working behind the lines on the Western front; they always arrived in the same shocking condition. I remember particularly one, in November 1917, coming back from Cambrai district. He was very bad and starved; he told me they had been very badly treated; all huddled together in barns, no sanitary arrangements, no blankets, and he said he had seen a native woman shot for giving them food; that they were well within range of guns, and within 6 kilometres of the lines. Shells frequently falling about them, and that he had seen many of his own comrades wounded while working, that they were knocked about by their guards, and, generally, his account of their treatment was appalling. To my knowledge from conversations with them, men were coming in who had been working close up behind the lines right down to the time I left Germany in December 1917."

From an Army Chaplain:—

" On the 16th February, 1917, there arrived in Minden Hospital sixteen men who had been working behind the Western front, attached to Camp E.K. 5. The thermometer registered 10° F. below zero. They had walked 7 kilometres

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from the station. Their clothing consisted of tunic, trousers, and thin shirt, boots and socks, and an old hat—no coat and no underclothes. They had been two days and two nights in the cold train with very little to eat. . . . Two of these men died later of consumption in Minden. They had all been captured in November (this was February), and their relatives did not know that they were even alive. These men report, too, that they are brutally treated; human life is not worth so much as horseflesh, because the latter can be eaten. They are worked until they either die or so completely collapse that they are useless. I believe this was the first party that arrived from the Western front. I had the names of the men in a notebook, but it was taken from me. They said it was nothing to wake up in the morning and find the man sleeping beside you dead. I got the names of several who had died, and wrote to their people to inform them."

The Committee would close these statements with the following striking extract from the evidence of a young wounded British officer who was placed in a ward in a German hospital in France, filled with prisoners of all nationalities. He says:—

"The German in charge of the ward was a University Professor, and seeing several of our men also Russians and Roumanians come on to the hospital in an emaciated condition, I asked him the cause and where they came from, when without giving me details he told me that they came from working camps behind the lines. There, he said, the conditions were frightful, so much so that he himself was ashamed of them—the men were overworked, under shell fire, very much underfed, had not much clothing, and slept in sheds and shelters in the snow, filthy conditions.

"I ascertained from him and from some of our own men that many died behind the lines; all were thoroughly ill-treated by the Germans, and the lives of those who did not die were made quite unbearable.

"I am sure the German who informed me had no personal grounds which made him complain against the system, it was merely on humanitarian grounds, that he told me he was shocked, and the independent stories I received from our own soldiers simply bore out the fact that the Germans were ill-treating their prisoners behind the lines at this time. While I was in hospital the German I have mentioned above did his best to get the men from the hospital marked unfit for work behind the lines, and I must in fairness add that as a result very few, if any, went back to work there once they had been sent to hospital, and they seemed to be marked for camps in Germany instead."

There the Committee are content for the present to leave this subject.

They make one remark only upon the situation disclosed in this report.

The Hague Convention of 1907 is now a far off thing. But the German Government was a party to it, and some of its provisions may be usefully recalled. Prisoners of war, so says the annex to that Convention, must be humanely treated; all their personal belongings, except arms, horses, and military papers, remain their property; the State may employ the labour of prisoners of war, other than officers, according to their rank and capacity, but the work shall not be excessive and shall have no connection with the operations of the war. The Government into whose hands prisoners of war have fallen is charged with their maintenance. In default of special agreement between the belligerents prisoners of war shall be treated as regards rations, quarters, and clothing, on the same footing as the troops of the Government which captured them.

The following extracts are from the German War Book:—

"Prisoners of war are protected against unjustifiable severities, ill-treatment, and unworthy handling; they do, indeed, lose their freedom, but not their rights; war captivity is, in other words, no longer an act of grace on the part of the victor, but a right of the defenceless."

Again—

"Prisoners of war can be put to moderate work proportionate to their position in life; work is a safeguard against excesses. Also on grounds of health this is desirable. But these tasks should not be prejudicial to health nor in any way dishonourable or such as contribute directly or indirectly to the military operations against the Fatherland of the captives."

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The Committee in their survey of the evidence dealt with in this report have failed to find a trace even of lip service either to the obligations so solemnly undertaken by the German Government in time of peace for regulating their conduct in time of war or to these principles from their War Book which that Government professed as their own.

Further comment appears to the Committee to be superfluous. The facts speak for themselves.

On behalf of the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of war,
ROBERT YOUNGER,
Chairman.

March 6, 1918.

APPENDIX (A).

No. 1.

NOTE VERBALE *received from the German Government on February* 7, 1917.

(Translation.)

THE German Government have received information that the British Government are detaining a considerable number of German prisoners of war in France behind the fighting front, where they are employed in various manners. According to the reports which have been received, these prisoners suffer from inadequate food, defective accommodation (only tents being provided in many cases), as well as being subjected to hard work and irregularities in the matter of their mails. Some of them are employed so near to the front that they are exposed to the fire of German guns and other dangers of warfare; this has resulted in several of them being killed and wounded.

The Foreign Office request the United States Embassy to inform the British Government of the foregoing, and to point out that in the French and Belgian territories occupied by German troops hitherto no British prisoners of war have been detained for any considerable time with the exception of the sick and wounded undergoing treatment in hospitals and the prisoners employed in the hospital services. With the above-mentioned exceptions, the only British prisoners of war who are at the present moment kept outside Germany are those who, on account of the transportation of German prisoners from England to Havre and Rouen, have been sent into occupied Russian territory, where they are subjected to the same conditions as the German prisoners at Havre and Rouen.

In view of the abuses connected with this detention of German prisoners behind the British front, the German Government are compelled to demand that the German prisoners detained behind the British front should be immediately removed to a distance of at least 30 kilometres behind the firing line, and provided there with accommodation in accordance with the requirements of the season of the year and with hygenic needs; further, in respect of their postal arrangements, that they should be placed on the same footing as British prisoners in Germany, and that a practice in harmony with these demands should be maintained also in the future. If a declaration is not received from the British Government by the 1st of February, stating that they are prepared to comply with the above specified demands, and to take measures to prevent German prisoners being again employed within 30 kilometres of the British front, a number of British prisoners of war will be transported from camps in Germany to the area of operations in the Western theatre of war, where, in respect of employment, accommodation, food, and the question of mails they will be treated in a manner corresponding to the practice of the British military authorities; similarly, British prisoners falling into German hands on the Western front will in future, and until further notice, be kept in similar conditions within the sphere of operations.

The Foreign Office request the Embassy as soon as possible to transmit these demands to the British Government and to forward their reply.

Berlin, January 24, 1917.

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No. 2.

Mr. Balfour to Sir W. Townley.

Sir, *Foreign Office, February* 8, 1917.

THE following information, respecting the alleged employment of German prisoners of war close behind the British lines in France, should be communicated to the Netherlands Government for the favour of transmission to the German Government:—

" In view of the number of letters which have been sent to Germany from German prisoners of war in France which express gratitude for, and surprise at, the kindly and humane treatment they have received, whether in hospital or employed on labour, ever since they fell into British hands, it is impossible to believe that the German Government are in doubt as to the conditions in which the German prisoners of war are actually employed. The men are given the same rations as British troops, they are warmly clad, receiving overcoats and the same underclothing as the British troops. They not infrequently urge their friends not to send food or clothing, as everything is provided for them. They are by no means overworked.

" As regards accommodation, seventy-five per cent. are in huts, and the remainder —as in the case of very many of the British troops—are temporarily in specially warmed tents, provided with floor boards, and to all are issued an ample supply of blankets. Consequent on the good treatment they receive, their health is very good.

" The only complaint as regards postal arrangements, which has come to notice, was explained on investigation by the fact that the man had communicated a wrong address to his friends. It is believed that, with this exception, the arrangements work smoothly and with reasonable expedition.

" Strict orders have been issued that prisoners shall not be employed in handling munitions or within range of the enemy's artillery.

" It is much regretted that, notwithstanding these precautions, one man was wounded by a shell which must have been fired at an exceptionally long range. This is the only casualty which has occurred."

I am, &c.,
A. J. BALFOUR.

No. 3.

Memorandum for communication to the German Government.

IN the *note verbale* of the German Government dated the 9th November, 1915,[1] it was stated that all prisoners of war in occupied territory were allowed the same postal facilities as prisoners of war in German prison camps.

The result of enquiries made from repatriated British prisoners of war, who have been treated in hospitals in occupied territory, has brought to light a number of instances in which the prisoners were not allowed to write in accordance with the assurances conveyed in the German note.

The following twelve cases are taken from amongst a number of others:—

1. *Private Baker*, the Sherwood Foresters, was in Barn Hospital from the 3rd July to 23rd July, 1916, but was not allowed to write.

2. *Private H. E. O. Hill*, the Canadians, who was in hospital at Bruges from the 26th April to the 9th October, 1915, was allowed to send only one post-card. He wrote several times, but these communications were returned from Berlin.

3. *Corporal B. A. Lewis*, East Yorkshire Regiment, was in hospital at Cambrai for five days, but was not allowed even to write a post-card.

4. *Private Albert Harris*, the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, who was in hospital at Cambrai, from the 28th September to 16th October, 1916, was allowed to write one post-card, but no letters.

5. *Private H. F. Rawles*, the Middlesex Regiment, was in hospital at Caudry from the 6th July to the 3rd September, 1916, and was allowed to write one post-card, but no letters.

[1] Not printed.

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6. *Private Cameron*, the Scottish Rifles, who was in hospital at Courtrai from July to October 1916, was allowed to write a post-card once a fortnight, but none reached their destination. He was not allowed to write letters.

7. *Rifleman Moody*, the Rifle Brigade, who was in hospital at Courtrai from September to October 1916, was allowed to write post-cards, but none reached their destination. He was not allowed to write letters.

8. *Private King*, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, who was in hospital at Courtrai from the 27th July to the 18th August, 1916, was allowed to write one post-card, which did not reach its destination. He was not allowed to write letters.

9. *Private Collyer*, the Royal Scots, was in hospital at Courtrai from the 25th September, 1915, to 24th January, 1916, but was not allowed to write either post-card or letter.

10. *Private Allan*, the Northumberland Fusiliers, was in hospital in Lille Fortress from the 4th to the 12th October, 1915, but was not allowed to write a letter.

11. *Private J. Heeson*, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who was in hospital at Seclin from the 22nd June to July 1916, and at Valenciennes from July to 3rd August, 1916, was allowed to write post-cards, but none reached their destinations. He was not allowed to write letters.

12. *Private Johnson*, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, who was in Velu Hospital from the 17th to the 31st August, 1916, was allowed to write one post-card which did not reach its destination. He was not allowed to write letters.

His Majesty's Government would be glad to learn why these prisoners were not allowed the proper correspondence facilities.

Foreign Office, March 21, 1917.

No. 4.

Memorandum for communication to the German Government.

HIS Majesty's Government have reason to suppose that a considerable number of British prisoners of war, captured in November, are retained for working parties behind the German lines; but the reports received from Germany, although they contain the addresses of men in field hospitals, give practically no information concerning prisoners in working camps in occupied territory. This is the more serious, because, as shown by the Foreign Office memorandum for communication to the German Government, dated the 21st March, 1917,[1] there appears to be considerable restraint upon correspondence from men in the occupied territory.

His Majesty's Government would, therefore, be glad if they could be furnished as soon as possible with official lists of all prisoners employed in working parties in occupied territory.

Foreign Office, April 7, 1917.

No. 5.

Mr. Balfour to Sir W. Townley (The Hague).

(Telegraphic.) *Foreign Office, April* 28, 1917.

FOLLOWING for communication to German Government by telegram:—

Orders have been issued that all German prisoners employed in France in rear of British front lines and on lines of communication are to be withdrawn 30 kilometres behind firing line.

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[1] See No. 3.

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No. 6.

Mr. Balfour to Sir W. Townley (The Hague).

(Telegraphic.) *Foreign Office, May* 3, 1917.

WE have received information from escaped British prisoners that in January there were some 300 or 400 British prisoners of war working at Cambrai who had never been sent to Germany, and whose names have never been reported to His Majesty's Government.

Please inform Netherland Minister at Berlin by telegraph, and ask him to obtain as soon as possible a list of all British combatant prisoners of war in the occupied portion of France or Belgium. It seems probable that the number is considerable.

No. 7.

Mr. Balfour to Sir W. Townley (The Hague).

(Telegraphic.) *Foreign Office, May* 11, 1917.

MY telegram of April 28th.

Following for communication to the German Government by telegraph :—

His Majesty's Government desire early assurance that all British prisoners of war in German hands will at once be withdrawn 30 kilometres behind firing lines on all fronts.

No. 8.

Memorandum for communication to the German Government.

TWO British prisoners of war, Private Downes and Lance-Corporal Parsey, captured on the 11th January, escaped on the 7th April from the German lines in France, and their sworn depositions have been taken.

It appears from these sworn statements that at Cambrai the prisoners received the following food :—

At 7.15 *a.m.*—One pint of coffee (no milk or sugar), quarter loaf of black bread (about half a pound).

Noon.—One pint of thin soup with very little meat in it.

4 *p.m.*—One pint of coffee without milk or sugar.

No further food was supplied.

The prisoners' quarters were so crowded that it was impossible for them to lie on their backs. No blankets or great coats were provided. No soap was provided.

At Ervillers the rain leaked through the prisoners' hut, and the prisoners suffered greatly from cold. Although there was a stove in the hut they were not allowed to light it. No blankets or great coats were provided. The prisoners had no waterproof sheets or protection from the weather. One of the deponents had his toes frost-bitten, and although his foot was so painful that he could hardly put a boot on he was compelled to go to work in the snow. As a result of this treatment he is still lame. The food at this place was as insufficient in quantity and bad in quality as that provided at Cambrai. The deponents were struck several times by the guard with the butts of their rifles, and they saw a number of other prisoners so struck, and one so severely hurt that he could not continue working. The sentries also struck prisoners in the face with the back of their hands. On at least a dozen occasions men were seen to faint while working. The Unter-Offizier was seen on two occasions to strike prisoners with a transport-driver's whip. Only a certain number of prisoners were allowed to report sick however ill they might be. One man who was very ill with colic received no medical attendance for several days. Another man, who was not allowed to report sick and compelled to work, fell down two hours later and was carried away unconscious. A corporal, whose back was covered

[1] See No. 5.

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with boils, was nevertheless compelled to work; he was very ill when the deponents escaped.

No fresh clothes were ever provided, nor was there any hot water. The prisoners could have washed their clothes in cold water, but they had no others to put on while they were doing so, and the cold was intense.

They worked seven days a week without any holiday. They received no letters or parcels, and were only allowed to write three postcards in three months, although they complained about not being allowed to do so. They received no pay for twenty days' work.

At Sauchy-Lestrée only one blanket per man was provided. Sleeping accommodation was also very crowded at this place. The work and general conditions were the same as at Ervillers.

At Sauchy-Cauchy the conditions of work were the same as at Sauchy-Lestrée. At this place the prisoners could get no water at all.

The deponents had only two baths during the three months that they were prisoners. Nearly all the prisoners at Sauchy-Cauchy were verminous.

Four shells fell into the village one night.

At the different places referred to, British corporals were made to work on the roads as if they were privates.

One of the deponents weighed thirteen stone when captured, and on return to the British lines was found to weigh only eight stone ten pounds.

His Majesty's Government must formally protest against the disgraceful conditions under which British prisoners of war are being employed in or in close proximity to the German lines. As the German Government were informed in the Foreign Office memorandum of the 20th ultimo the German prisoners of war behind the British lines are fed and clothed not less well than the British troops, and to expect men to work on the fare provided for the British prisoners can only be described as utterly inhuman.

With regard to the presence of British prisoners in the proximity to the German lines the German Government have on more than one occasion denied that any British prisoners were interned outside Germany except in occupied Russian territory. In the German *note verbale* of the 24th January last[1] it is stated that " In the French and Belgian territories occupied by German troops no British prisoners of war have hitherto been detained for any considerable time with the exception of the sick and wounded undergoing treatment in hospitals and the prisoners employed in the hospital services. With the above-mentioned exceptions the only British prisoners of war who are at the present time kept outside Germany are those who, on account of the transportation of German prisoners from England to Havre and Rouen, have been sent into occupied Russian territory."

Again the German Government informed the Netherland Minister at Berlin in a *note verbale*, dated the 5th March,[2] that British prisoners of war had not yet been sent quite close to the German firing line on the Russian front.

In view of the information now in possession of His Majesty's Government, to which further reference is made in the Foreign Office memorandum[3] of to-day's date, it is clear that both these statements are absolutely untrue.

His Majesty's Government must now demand, especially in view of the fact that they have expressed their willingness to withdraw the German prisoners to a distance of not less than thirty kilometres behind the British lines, that all the British prisoners behind the German lines, both on the Eastern and Western fronts, shall be at once withdrawn to that distance, that they shall be properly fed and clothed like the German prisoners in British hands, that they shall be allowed the same facilities to send and receive letters as German prisoners of war in British hands, that they shall be in all respects properly treated, that abuses such as the striking of prisoners shall immediately cease and that the prisoners shall not be prevented from reporting sick.

His Majesty' Government reserve to themselves freedom to take any action they may find advisable should the German Government not comply with the above demands.

The failure of the German Government to report the names of British prisoners of war detained behind the German lines in France is forming the subject of a separate communication.

Foreign Office, May 19, 1917.

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[1] See No. 1. [2] Not printed. [3] See No. 9.

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No. 9.

Memorandum for communication to the German Government.

IN the Foreign Office memorandum of the 7th ult.[1]—to which no reply has yet been received—attention was drawn to the failure of the German Government to forward to this country information regarding British prisoners of war detained in working camps in occupied territory. It was pointed out that this failure was rendered more serious by the restraint imposed by the German authorities on the correspondence of such prisoners.

Information which has reached His Majesty's Government since the date of that memorandum, shows that the position regarding the official notification of these prisoners is worse than had been supposed.

Three lists A, B, and C, are enclosed by way of illustration.

List A.[2]

The soldiers named on this list, who belong to one regiment selected out of many, were missing on the 18th November, 1916. Correspondence has been received from them which shows them to be prisoners of war in occupied territory. No official report that they are prisoners has, however, been received.

List B.[3]

The soldiers named on this list are stated by certain prisoners of war to be employed, or to have been employed, in working parties in occupied territory. No official report that they are prisoners of war has, however, been received, and, so far as His Majesty's Government are aware, no correspondence from them has ever reached this country.

List C.[4]

The soldiers named on this list have only recently been reported prisoners, though they had all been captured over four months, and some of them as long as six months, before the receipt in this country of news that they were prisoners of war.

The names on lists A and B are only instances of a large number of cases.

In these circumstances His Majesty's Government must demand of the German Government an assurance that notification of the capture of British prisoners of war, as required by article 14 of the Annex to The Hague Convention 1907, shall be despatched within a reasonable time. Should such assurance not be received within 6 weeks of the date of this memorandum, or should future practice show that it is not being observed, His Majesty's Government will hold themselves free to take any action which they consider appropriate.

Foreign Office, May 19, 1917.

No. 10.

Mr. Balfour to Sir W. Townley (The Hague).

(Telegraphic.) *Foreign Office, May* 30, 1917.

FOLLOWING for Netherland Minister at Berlin:—

All German prisoners of war in British hands have been withdrawn to a distance of 30 kilometres from firing line. We desire immediate information that British prisoners of war in German hands have been withdrawn to similar distance from firing line both on the Eastern and Western fronts.

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[1] See No. 4. [2] This list of seventeen names is not printed.
[3] Not printed, contains nineteen names. [4] Not printed, contains sixty-five names.

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No. 11.

Mr. Balfour to Sir W. Townley (The Hague).

(Telegraphic.) *Foreign Office, June 7, 1917.*

FURTHER detailed and well-authenticated testimonies from recently escaped men have revealed the indisputable fact that British prisoners in occupied territory on both fronts have been treated with deliberate and shocking barbarity. Many have died or are permanently broken in health.

A fuller communication will be sent through the Dutch Government in due course. His Majesty's Government are considering the situation created by the revelation of these atrocities. Meanwhile they desire to make immediate protest in the foregoing terms.

No. 12.

Sir W. Townley to Mr. Balfour.—(Received July 4.)

(Telegraphic.) *The Hague, July 3, 1917.*

FOLLOWING from German Government: According to existing provisions despatch of prisoners who are capable of being transported ought to take place at once. Therefore, cases cited[1] by British Government are exceptional ones in which despatch has been delayed during heavy fighting when means of transport have been in urgent demand. Military authorities have at once opened necessary enquiries into list of names which have been communicated. Further information will be communicated. There can be no question in any case of intentional retention or concealment of British prisoners of war.

No. 13.

NOTE VERBALE *received from the German Government on July 9, 1917.*

(Translation.)

WITH reference to the Netherlands Legation's Note of the 2nd June, the Foreign Office have the honour to state that the withdrawal of British prisoners of war in the German fighting zone to a distance of 30 kilometres behind the firing line has been carried through everywhere.

Berlin, June 15, 1917.

No. 14.

Memorandum for communication to the German Government.

ACCORDING to Annex 6 of the recent Hague Agreement regarding prisoners of war, General Friedrich states that parcels were being delivered in the working camps in occupied districts as freely as in the camps in Germany, and that in these working camps the same privileges of correspondence would be permitted to the prisoners as in other camps.

From the letter from Major Draudt, which was forwarded with the Netherland Legation's note of the 22nd August,[2] it appeared that Major Draudt was satisfied that proper arrangements had been made regarding British prisoners of war in the occupied territory on the Western front. He stated that these prisoners of war were not prevented from writing, and that the receipt of postal matter by them was not limited.

A large amount of evidence has now been accumulated by His Majesty's Government which shows conclusively that both arrangements for delivery of parcels to the prisoners in question, and for their correspondence are, or until recently have been, wholly unsatisfactory.

[1] See No. 9. [2] Not printed.

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In a letter recently received from the Agence internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre, it was stated that a large number of post-cards sent to British prisoners, who wrote from the Limburg address, had been returned marked "Destinataire introuvable," and that the point had been reached when the Agence Internationale did not know whether to advise the families of these prisoners to continue to send parcels which did not arrive or to discontinue despatching them, to the great prejudice of those prisoners who might, perhaps, receive some of them.

The following cases may be specially mentioned:—

1. The case of Private Barker. This soldier was captured on the 27th February, the first parcel was despatched to him on the 2nd June, and none had been received by him on the 1st September.

2. The case of Private C. E. Coles, 1st Wellington Regiment, New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Private Coles had not been officially reported as a prisoner of war, but the fact that he was a prisoner was mentioned in a letter from another prisoner, and a post-card addressed to Coles by the Bureau de Secours at Berne was returned by the German authorities with a notification that Coles could not be traced.

3. The case of Sergeant R. F. Notley, 2nd Auckland Battalion, to whom parcels were regularly sent from the 15th May, 1917, but who had received nothing by the 16th September.

4. A number of cases of Canadian prisoners of war, which have been collected by the Canadian Red Cross Society. From many of these prisoners no letters have been received since the date of their capture.

5. The case of Lance-Corporal C. F. Bourne, 7th Buffs, who wrote from Limburg Camp on the 15th July, saying he was captured on the 18th November, 1916, and had received no correspondence from home nor any parcels. A letter which his wife addressed to him was returned from Limburg stamped on the 14th July (the day before Bourne himself wrote from Limburg) "Destinataire introuvable." In his letter of the 15th July, Bourne says "I shall *now* be allowed to send you two letters a month and four post-cards if I can *get the stationery*." In a card, dated the 29th September, Bourne repeated the complaint that he had not received either letters or food parcels.

6. The case of Lance-Corporal Brown, 15th Battalion H.L.I. He wrote from Wahn, in May 1917, and during June and July he wrote cards which bore the Limburg post-mark. A card was sent to him on the 21st July, addressed to Wahn, and was returned marked "Destinataire introuvable," having also been stamped "Not at Limburg." In a letter, dated the 15th October, Brown stated that he had not heard from home nor received any parcels.

7. A large number of cases collected up to the end of September by the Sherwood Foresters Prisoners of War Care Committee of prisoners belonging to that regiment from whom no communication has been received since they were reported prisoners or at any rate for several months.

8. The case of Gunner A. C. Nicholson, 5th Battery, 2nd Artillery Brigade, Australian Imperial Forces. This prisoner was captured on the 15th April, 1917, and wrote on the 7th September last that he had received neither letters nor parcels. Two letters have, however, been addressed to him weekly by his relatives in this country.

9. The case of Private J. Mackenzie, Cameron Highlanders. He was captured 23rd December, 1916, and was given the Limburg address. Parcels were sent to him regularly from the 30th March, but no word had been received from him up to the 1st October.

10. An examination of correspondence from British prisoners of war despatched in August, and bearing the Limburg address, shows that several had been prisoners 9 or 10 months without receiving letters or parcels.

Special attention has been given to this matter by the Newfoundland War Contingent Association, and the information collected by them is very instructive. They state that on the 20th July, seventy-seven Newfoundland prisoners were officially reported, all of whom were captured at Monchy le Prieux on the 14th April. First capture and emergency parcels were despatched to them, and the regulation number of ordinary parcels (three a fortnight) were also forwarded in due course, addressed to the prisoners at Limburg, the address given for the prisoners in the report of capture. Two of these men were reported dead on the 18th October, leaving seventy-five, from whom only fourteen post-cards, bearing date 10th September.

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have been received. In these post-cards the prisoners ask for food, and clearly indicate that no parcels have reached them.

The earliest acknowledgment of any parcels from the seventy-five men was dated the 11th September, and up to the 31st ultimo only six acknowledgments of parcels had been received.

It is therefore observed that from the date of capture (14th April, 1917) to the date of the receipt of report of capture (20th July), sixty-six days elapsed. From the date of the receipt of the report of capture to the date of the earliest card acknowledging receipt of a parcel (11th September) fifty-three days elapsed, and as that card took thirty-five days in transit, no less a period than 154 days elapsed between the date of capture and the receipt in London of the first post-card acknowledging the receipt of food.

Attention is particularly drawn to the fact that there are still sixty-nine men of the Newfoundland Contingent who have not yet acknowledged a parcel at all.

It would be interesting to know what has become of the total number of parcels sent to prisoners of the Newfoundland Contingent in question, viz., seventy-seven first capture parcels, 154 emergency food parcels, 1,155 ordinary food parcels, and seventy-seven parcels of clothing.

With regard to the outgoing correspondence of prisoners of war detained in the occupied territory of the Western front, Major Draudt stated in his letter, above referred to, that there existed no prohibition on writing. It appears, however, to be clearly established that if outgoing letters and cards are not prohibited, at any rate no facilities for such correspondence are provided. In other words the German authorities do not, as is the case for German prisoners in British hands, supply writing paper and pens. The great need of proper arrangements being made for the correspondence of the British prisoners of war in question is emphasised by the fact that, as it is understood, the German authorities do not undertake to deliver letters or parcels at the address given on the post-card notifying capture, as such address can only be regarded as temporary, and that relatives must therefore await a further communication from the prisoners giving a permanent address.

Furthermore, it seems that there is in force for British prisoners detained in the Western area a system of registration, and that before such registration is effected parcels cannot be delivered. For example, one prisoner writes: " I have written to you before this, but I am very doubtful whether you have received any of them as we were not registered prisoners at the time. It appears to be a rule that one has to be a prisoner three months before he is registered, when, the time being up, the Commandant told us we were registered prisoners of war and would receive our mail and parcels." Another prisoner writes: " I do not think I shall have to wait long for a reply now I am registered. I have not had a letter for nearly seven months, but I think . . . . we should be able to get correspondence through now we are registered."

Whereas any German prisoner captured by the British forces can write letters and receive them or parcels from the earliest days of capture with absolute assurance, it seems it takes at least three months even to register a man in German hands.

It is, of course, difficult to say whether the deplorable conditions mentioned above are due to thoroughly inefficient organisation on the part of the German authorities in the area in question or whether they are to any extent deliberate, but the hardship resulting to prisoners and to their relatives is so great that His Majesty's Government are compelled to demand an absolute assurance (1) that the British prisoners in the Western area shall be provided with all reasonable facilities to enable them to correspond with their relatives and friends in this country, and (2) that efficient arrangements shall at once be made to enable the British prisoners in question to receive their letters and parcels without unreasonable delay, and (3) that proper records shall be kept by the German authorities of British prisoners of war.

In conclusion reference is made to the terms of paragraphs 21 and 22 of The Hague Agreement regarding prisoners of war.

Foreign Office, November 26, 1917.

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No. 15.

Memorandum for communication to the Netherlands Legation (British Section) at Berlin.

IN the German *note verbale* of the 24th January last,[1] a copy of which was forwarded with the despatch from the United States Ambassador at Berlin, dated the 25th January last, it was stated that no British prisoners, with the exception of sick and wounded and prisoners employed with the hospital services, had been detained for any considerable time within the occupied districts on the Western front.

A large number of reports from escaped British prisoners of war have recently been received, and these men state that they have had conversations in different camps with British prisoners who had been detained for many months in the occupied area in question. These reports leave no room for doubt that it was the practice of the German authorities, notwithstanding their denial mentioned above to employ, from as far back as October and November 1916, British prisoners in the occupied area in question, and that the work which they were compelled to perform was often directly connected with the operations of war. Information in this sense was furnished to the escaped prisoners by British prisoners who were sent from the occupied area to the camps at Castrop, Stockum, and Munster. Many of these prisoners stated that they were employed in digging trenches and in the preparation of the Hindenburg line at a time prior to the reprisals taken by the German authorities on account of the employment by the British authorities of German prisoners within 30 kilometres of the firing line in France.

His Majesty's Government desire to protest in the strongest possible manner against the employment of British prisoners in the manner in which these British prisoners were employed, and must express their surprise that the German Government should have professed indignation at, and should have subjected British prisoners of war to most severe reprisals as the result of the employment by the British military authorities of German prisoners within 30 kilometres of the firing line at a time when German authorities themselves were employing British prisoners of war within the zone of operations on work directly connected with operations of war.

The attitude of the German Government in this matter is rendered the more unqualifiable by their above-mentioned note which was clearly intended to imply that no British prisoners were detained in the occupied districts of the Western front except for purely temporary reasons.

Foreign Office, November 26, 1917.

No. 16.

Memorandum for communication to the Netherlands Legation (British Section) at Berlin.

WITH reference to the Foreign Office memorandum of the 26th ult.,[2] regarding parcels for and correspondence of British prisoners of war at working camps in the occupied districts of France, His Majesty's Government have the honour to enclose copies of extracts from reports by two British prisoners of war, Lance-Corporal Peachey and Private Lee, who recently escaped from Germany.

The statements of these men disclose a most disgraceful state of affairs which can only result from gross incapacity or intentional obstruction on the part of the German authorities concerned; and, whichever may be the cause, His Majesty's Government must enter a most emphatic protest against the conditions complained of by Lance-Corporal Peachey and Private Lee.

With regard to the case of Lance-Corporal C. J. Bourne, being case No. 5 mentioned in the above Foreign Office memorandum, a further card from this prisoner, dated the 26th October, has now been received in which he still complains that he has not received either letters or parcels.

It is requested that the foregoing may be communicated to the German Government.

Foreign Office, December 14, 1917.

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[1] See No. 1. [2] See No. 14.

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Enclosure in No. 16.

Extracts from Reports given by :—

Lance-Corporal F. A. W. Cleave Peachey, No. 940, 15th Battalion A.I.F. Captured: Riencourt, April 11, 1917. Escaped: November 5, 1917. Camps: Lille, Brebieres, Quartes, Velaines Hospital.

" I had no letters and no parcels all the time I was a prisoner. One or two English soldiers received Red Cross cards saying that parcels had left England for them, but up to the time I left none had arrived at the compound. Two men had been taken under guard to Tennai, and there they saw thousands of English parcels. A great many were broken and the contents lying on the floor. Most of these were addressed to Canadian soldiers. Tennai was a German headquarters about 50 kilometres by rail from Quartes. They also saw there a great number of prisoners' of war blue overcoats stacked up ready to be sent to different places.

" When we wrote home ' Kriegsgefangenensendung, Kriegsgefangenenstammlager, Friedrichsfeld,' or ' Kriegsgefangenenstammlager, Limburg a/d Lahn, Et. Inspektion, 6 Deutschfeldspost. 409, Prisoner of War, Germany,' or ' Kriegsgefangenenstammlager, Limburg a/d Lahn, Et. Inspektion, 6 Feldpoststation, 409 (früher Wahn), or ' Kriegsgefangenenlager Wahn (R.H.L.D.), Germany,' or ' Kriegsgefangenenlager Ortskommandantur, 50 Feldpost, 413, Prisoner of War,' were written on the top of the face of the envelope. We were told to write them by the interpreter. In a week or so the letter would come back, and we would be told to destroy that envelope and put on the new address. The first address on the above is the latest; the last I received before I escaped. I have not the envelopes, but I kept a note of the addresses in my notebook."

Private J. Lee, No. 4534, 14th Battalion, A.I.F. Captured: Riencourt, April 11, 1917. Escaped: November 5, 1917. Camps: Lille, Brebieres, Orchies, Quartes.

Brebieres.—April 18-middle July, 1917.

" We were allowed to write letters and post-cards, but after a time we gave up doing so, because after a week had elapsed from the time we wrote our letter or card it was returned to us with the information that the address to which a reply should be sent had been altered; sometimes the address given us was Limburg a/Lahn or Friedrichsfeld, and various other places, the names of which I cannot remember. This happened week after week, until we got tired of writing letters and having them returned the next week. I never received a letter at this camp, nor did any of the other men who were with me, and, of course, none of us got any parcels."

Quartes.—July-November 5, 1917.

" We were given a post-card and were told to put a certain address; at the end of a week the card was returned for us to put a fresh address, and at last we got tired of writing. Every letter we wrote, either here or elsewhere, came back, and during the whole time I was a prisoner I never received either a letter or parcel."

No. 17.

Mr. Balfour to Sir W. Townley[1] (*The Hague*).

(Telegraphic.) *Foreign Office, January* 14, 1918.

PLEASE request the Netherlands Legation to obtain from the German authorities replies to the following enquiries :—

(*a.*) Is there, or has there been, since the agreement was concluded, any camp for British prisoners of war (other than mere collecting stations for those recently captured which would be occupied for not more than a few days)

[1] No reply has been received to this communication.

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within thirty kilometres of the German first-line trenches on the Western front?

(*b.*) Has any British prisoner of war been employed since the agreement in labour other than that necessitated by the ordinary sanitary requirements of the temporary camps above-mentioned within the above limit?

(*c.*) Were any British prisoners of war engaged in labour, other than the ordinary sanitary labour of a temporary camp, in and near Cambrai or Cantaing in October or November 1917?

No. 18.

Mr. Balfour to Sir W. Townley (The Hague).

(Telegraphic.) *Foreign Office, February* 20, 1918.

FOLLOWING for Netherlands Legation at Berlin for communication to the German Government:—

His Majesty's Government have now received overwhelming evidence regarding employment of British prisoners of war on the Western front, which convincingly establishes—

(1.) That British prisoners of war were employed within thirty kilometres of the firing line at least as early as July 1916, *i.e.*, a considerable time before the German Government denied that such employment had commenced and sought to justify it as an act of reprisal.

(2.) That these prisoners were treated with the utmost brutality, and that most of the deaths at Dulmen[1] attributed by the Germans to such causes as heart weakness and intestinal catarrh were, in fact, directly due to starvation and ill-treatment on the Western front.

(3.) That although an agreement was concluded between His Majesty's Government and the German Government at the end of April 1917 not to employ prisoners of war within thirty kilometres of the firing line, British prisoners were, up to the time of the most recent information, being employed within that limit.

(4.) That British prisoners were treated with extreme brutality on the Western front up to within a few days ago, being forced to work on totally insufficient food, until rendered useless owing to extreme weakness. That they were employed on work directly barred by Article 6 of the Annex to The Hague Convention, such work being immediately connected with the operations of war. That these men continued to arrive during the autumn and winter of 1917 at hospitals and camps in Germany in a state of misery and semi-starvation.

(5.) That British non-commissioned officers (notwithstanding their rank and consequent exemption from manual labour) have been compelled to perform manual labour, often within the thirty-kilometre limit.

The allegations in (3), (4), and (5) are established by the evidence not only of British soldiers but also by the evidence of persons of other nationalities, whose reports on this subject have been communicated to His Majesty's Government.

Accordingly, it is confirmed that the German military authorities have been guilty of the grossest brutality towards British prisoners of war employed in the occupied districts of France, and have violated two agreements: namely, the agreement concluded in April last not to employ British prisoners of war within thirty kilometres of the firing line, and the agreement against the employment of non-commissioned officers otherwise than in work of supervision.

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[1] See Appendix (B).

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APPENDIX (B).

No. 1.

Memorandum for communication to the German Government.

IN an official list dated the 26th March, 1917, and forwarded through Berne, there appears the report of the death of No. 18695 Private J. Greenwood, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who died at Dulmen on the 12th March.

In the same list there also appears the report of the deaths of No. 9725 Private A. Farrow, 2nd Battalion, Suffolk Regiment, and No. 7529 Private D. Nicolson, Royal West Surrey Regiment; and further, in the official German List No. 238, forwarded through the Netherlands Legation at Berlin, there are similar reports respecting No. 43244 Private J. Burgess, Suffolk Regiment, and No. 27272 Private R. Woodburn, Highland Light Infantry. All these men are shown to have died at Dulmen on the 16th March, 1917, after having been in hospital at Cambrai.

His Majesty's Government would be glad to obtain full information regarding the causes of death in each of these cases, no information on this subject having been furnished in the lists in question.

Foreign Office, May 25, 1917.

No. 2.

Memorandum for communication to the Netherlands Legation (British Section) at Berlin.

WITH reference to the Foreign Office memorandum of the 25th ult.,[1] respecting the deaths of certain British prisoners of war at Dulmen, His Majesty's Government have since received information that the number of deaths of British prisoners of war at Dulmen during the second half of March was considerably in excess of that mentioned in the Foreign Office memorandum under reference.

His Majesty's Government would therefore be much obliged if they might be furnished as soon as possible with a list giving the number of deaths of British prisoners of war which have occurred at Dulmen since the beginning of March, and showing the cause of, and circumstances attending, death in each case.

They would also be much obliged if this camp might be visited at an early date, by a representative of the Netherland Legation (British Section) at Berlin, and if the cause of the abnormal mortality might then be carefully investigated.

Foreign Office, June 4, 1917.

No. 3.

NOTE VERBALE *received from the German Government on July* 23, 1917.

(Translation.)

THE Foreign Office has the honour to inform the Royal Netherlands Legation that all the British military persons specified in its *note verbale* of the 8th inst.[1] died as the result of intestinal catarrh or heart weakness.

Berlin, June 23, 1917.

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[1] See No. 1.

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